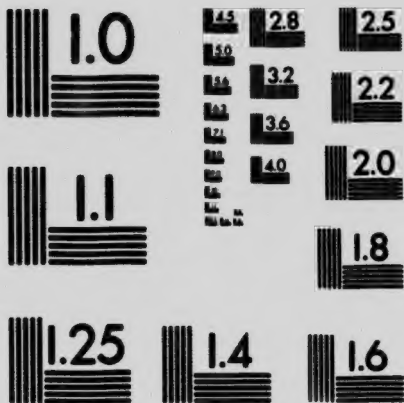




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PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 28

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

BY

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BASIS OF PUBLICATION

This series of Papers is issued under the auspices of a Committee drawn from various Christian bodies and political parties and is based on the following convictions :

1. That Great Britain was in August morally bound to declare war and is no less bound to carry the war to a decisive issue ;
2. That the war is none the less an outcome and a revelation of the un-Christian principles which have dominated the life of Western Christendom and of which both the Church and the nations have need to repent ;
3. That followers of Christ, as members of the Church, are linked to one another in a fellowship which transcends all divisions of nationality or race ;
4. That the Christian duties of love and forgiveness are as binding in time of war as in time of peace ;
5. That Christians are bound to recognize the insufficiency of mere compulsion for overcoming evil and to place supreme reliance upon spiritual forces and in particular upon the power and method of the Cross ;
6. That only in proportion as Christian principles dictate the terms of settlement will a real and lasting peace be secured ;
7. That it is the duty of the Church to make an altogether new effort to realize and apply to all the relations of life its own positive ideal of brotherhood and fellowship ;
8. That with God all things are possible.

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LOOKING over the files of newspapers since the beginning of August, it is pathetic to see how many of our anticipations of a speedy victory have been falsified, and how many cocksure headlines, even in the sanest paper, testify that the wish is father to the thought. But there is nothing more pathetic than to read of the hopes of *moral* conquest with which we reassured our consciences. This was the War to end Militarism; the Last War, most frequently the War against War. It is plain that the declaration of this was as sincere as it was general. German papers loved up their readers with the same promise. How different is the tone to-day! We have seen more clearly what war means and we find honour billeted with some menacing problems for its bedfellows. Italy, chivalrous nation though she really is, may join in when it is clearer who will be victorious, and it is her own interests she will seek. Japan has aroused anxious questionings by her *apologia* for retaining Tsing-tau and by the pressure she has put upon China while other hands were occupied. Finland seems to find it difficult to accept Russia as one of the knights-errant of outraged nationality. Serbia has suffered with a noble courage that must of itself bring atonement; but who can be sure that the best elements in the nation will guide her diplomacy? The kind of bait offered to the other Balkan States to draw them into the struggle arouses some misgiving as to the influences which will dictate a settlement. Worst of all, we begin to suspect the existence within ourselves of exactly the same possibilities for evil as we fear in others. Is our sense of honour stronger than our self-interest? Is there any strong assurance that we shall suppress the tendencies and policies in Britain which help to keep war smouldering on? Military victory may bring moral defeat. That is why our journalists are less confident, and why there is growing upon us the suspicion that the

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settlement will defy the ingenuity of man. To do them credit, our statesmen for the most part are sparing of brave words about the future that is to be. They know how many are the rocks ahead.

One thing, however, it is now possible to say with confidence ; the genuineness and finality of the settlement must depend on the domination of the moral factor. The very utmost that we must hope from this war is that we may successfully resist aggression, and perhaps demonstrate even to the Germans that militarism does not pay. Force cannot create a temper inclined to peace, and the problem is how to create it. It is true that we may hope a good deal from the failure of the military machine to give to the German multitudes the security promised by its originators and advocates. Kicking against the pricks has before now disposed a soul to conversion, and God often uses failure to bring a man or a people to repentance and common sense. But even for this there must be other conditions besides force.

One of these is clear enough, though it is negative. Force must not be pressed to the point where it is felt to be a cruelty and humiliation. Both these terms, and especially humiliation, require a certain amount of definition ; for a nation which has set out to grasp the leadership of Europe and to crush the peoples into the mould of its own arbitrary ideal must accept a certain sort of humbling as the price of failure. If Germany has set her heart upon a Germanic domination of Europe, and is humiliated as long as she, like others, is the servant of the common weal, then sooner or later humiliation must be her portion. It is unthinkable that she should retain Belgium, and justice will cry out upon us unless in Belgium and Northern France she is compelled to repair the ruin she has caused with so wilful a calculation. There may be other items in the sentence passed upon her ; to say nothing of the casualty lists, the loss of foreign trade, and the despoil done to every German reputation by outrages on land and by the murder of non-combatants at sea ; but when we say that Germany should not be

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humiliated, we mean that war should not be carried to such a point, nor should such terms be imposed, as will drive the quietest and kindest of her people into a passionate struggle for redress.

However negative our first condition may be, it commits us to a second condition, which is positive and far-reaching: a final settlement must depend upon the will of Germany; in other words, Germany must reform herself.

All our proverbs about taking horses to the water, and our insistence at the time of the Jameson Raid that we would 'beat our own dogs', should remind us that the temper of a nation can never be changed by any outside compulsion, but only by the free choice of the nation itself. Indeed, any undue interference from without is more than likely to harden the very tendencies we wish to cleanse away. This can be stated in concrete political terms. If after such enormous sacrifices to their demands the militarist party should fail, if the sword should break in the hands of Germany, it is to be hoped that other elements among the German people will come to power. Others besides the Social Democrats are beginning to be distrustful of the policy that has brought their country to this pass. But on the other hand, if we convince such men that the Allies are seeking to destroy the chance of German progress and cripple her expansion once for all, we shall take away from them the will, and by the same stroke the power, to lead their country in a new path. That settlement, therefore, will be most permanently effective which breaks the power of the military party without embittering the better elements among the German people. God will see to their judgment for the way they used their votes in the past; it is politic for us to help them to vote rightly in the future. And it is politic mainly because it is Christian.

There is a third condition, which must be lightly touched. It is futile to think of conducting the reform of Germany in isolation from the rest of Europe. Suppose that we succeeded, the moral condition of the rest of Europe,

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including ourselves, would drag her back. She is by no means the only enemy of peace. Is Russia entirely without fault? Are we to pretend that our Allies in the Balkan States, present and prospective, have no need of repentance? Does not the mention of the Balkan States remind us that it is easier to begin a war by mutual agreement than to end it in mutual honour, and that on a larger scale we may see, and perhaps be dragged into, dissensions or actual conflict like that secondary Balkan war which scandalized the world? Do we forget our own history of conquest, sometimes by means ill to defend before standards of to-day? And have we not still among us those who are always urging Britain to extend this or that sphere of influence? Have we no regret for the challenge of our navy, and still more for the way in which certain of our statesmen have boasted of our Dreadnoughts and our guns? Let us once more remind ourselves that the fear of Russia on the one hand, and of the British Navy on the other, has been used by the militarists of Germany to persuade the more peaceful elements that they must be prepared to hack their way through. We hear that the general attitude of the better minds of Germany to the Zabern incident, for example, was something like this: 'We hate this kind of military insolence as much as you would, but the officers demand it and it is the price we pay them for our protection.' Violence is the child of fear, and war will persist as long as the power of one nation can be regarded as a threat to another. The victory of the Allies, when it is secured, will be a vain achievement if we stop there. What we want is a stupendous change—nothing less than a new Europe, a Europe in which men realize with Romain Rolland that civilization is their true Fatherland and that the nations are its hand-maids.¹ But shall only found that commonwealth

¹ 'J'entends défendre dans chaque peuple (ami ou ennemi) ce qu'il y a de grand et de bon: car c'est le trésor commun de l'humanité civilisée tout entière, qui est ma vraie patrie.' *Cambridge Magazine*, Dec. 5, 1914.

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as all the nations in willing unison bring into it their honour and their glory, as to Zion of old.

Now it is plain that the forces against any settlement of this kind are enormous. Some of these have been hinted at already, but the real opposition will come from distempers of the spirit. It is these that lie at the root of all the manifestations which distress us. So much of the world, so much of our own world, is selfish and apparently beyond the reach of ideal considerations. It has been a little disappointing in the last few days to read the attacks upon Dr. Lyttelton for his address at St. Margaret's. The patronizing admonitions of papers usually sympathetic to the search for a Christian ethic have been almost harder to bear. Here was an attempt to put Britain on fair terms, not with Germany, but with the rest of the world, an attempt to show the sort of policy which we must follow if we are to prove ourselves sincere in fighting against the German passion for dominion, and, behold, an outcry bursts forth from every side that the Head Master of Eton is pro-German! Is it impossible for us to apply to ourselves the measure we mete out to others? Dr. Lyttelton's whole thought was tentative; is it a sort of treachery even to discuss the future? If it be stated that such a speech does harm in Germany, what must we say of much 'patriotic' speaking and writing, which strengthens the resistance of all good Germans by convincing them that we aim at nothing less than the root and branch destruction of their Fatherland? What of the articles which alarm other nations by their unconscious revelation of the selfishness of certain of our 'imperial' thinking? Certainly many who held their peace were grateful that a prominent man should be so outspoken and that the country should be forced to think. But the fact that such an appeal to British fairness was so easily misunderstood, shows how reluctant are many minds among us to examine the practical bearing of the ideals we profess. At the same time we must admit that the achievement we seek is stupendous, and can only be secured by an immense concentration

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of moral force. When we look at the opposition and then at the task, we see at once that on the ordinary planes of political argument there is little to encourage.

But are we restricted to the ordinary plane? We stand before a disaster beyond precedent; is it impossible to believe that the moral forces it generates will also be unprecedented, that it may usher in a new epoch?

I once travelled through one of the driest and sandiest plains of Northern China. Where the country was left to itself, the sand was encroaching all the time on the better soil. Yet the cultivated areas were peculiarly fertile. The secret lay in the fact that a very short way below the surface there was a fine water-bearing stratum. All the day and almost all the night the irrigation wheel brought up water, and the stream ran hither and thither like a thing alive. On the surface there was no hope or promise, yet it was only necessary to drive down to strata below to conquer the desert and turn barrenness to brilliant green. That is exactly our case at the present crisis. We must drive down to new planes of spiritual experience, and when we do, we shall find the water waiting for us.

Now to any Christian it is a matter of mere intuition that the water we need to find and draw, is the power of God. The Christian believes that there is no crisis beyond the reach of that power, and that at such a time as this we may regard it as only normal that God should say, 'Now will I arise, now will I lift up myself, now will I be exalted.' The central fact of this whole cataclysm is that God will still the storm and use its devastations for His own great purposes. Even amid the barren brutalities of a world at war we may draw the refreshment we need from the 'wells of deliverance'.

But upon this central subject others have written better than I. The purpose of this paper is to encourage and support such a faith by showing that the power of God is even now working among men in order to prepare the way for those moral changes by which alone our great object may be gained. Some of us do not find

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it easy to grasp religion except through the medium of some earthly example. Talk to us of God Himself and it all seems very abstract ; but our hearts leap to Him when we see some man ranging himself on God's side. The servant of the prophet saw no help for his master until his eyes were opened and he saw the chariots of fire. For the ordinary man that is the way in which God becomes plain ; indeed, it was to appeal to such that our Lord took flesh and dwelt with us ; there was no other way for the ordinary man to know God.

Let us, then, attempt^t to review some of the main evidences that a spirit is abroad which will help to create a great commonwealth of united civilization, the embodiment of Christianity in the life of the nations. We shall find much cause for encouragement.

In the first place there is the fact that the strongest appeal to undertake and prosecute the war is the appeal of right. Self-interest may jump with morality, and in some quarters we read Jingo arguments which would match anything in Bernhardt ; yet, speaking broadly, it is the argument of duty towards an injured people that has reconciled a peace-loving country to participation, and sent the best of the young men of England to the fighting they have been brought up to hate. Nor does this apply only to those claiming to be swayed by duty. Many of our soldiers would be shy of admitting that the argument from justice had much to do with their desire to serve their country, and yet it is safe to say that of this very type few would have volunteered if they had not felt subconsciously that right was on the side of adventure or pride of country or whatever else made them enlist. To say that many German soldiers feel in the same way, so far from exploding our argument, is rather a cause for encouragement. That they should apply moral standards to facts misunderstood makes them more dangerous as foes, and how they can square their belief with their conduct passes our understanding ; yet an immature, or even a mistaken, belief in goodness contains the promise of a new day.

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Second of the causes for hope is that among the representative classes of this country we have seen so little sign of hatred, as compared with what might have been expected. We may discount this by saying that we have not as yet realized all that this war might mean to us, or that it is merely a sense of good form which restrains us; but we shall misrepresent the facts unless we realize that there is something of present moment and future promise in the comparative absence of bitterness against Germany. That this should be so does not in the least detract from our determination; it only means that we realize that we shall have to live with Germany in the future, and that it is not worth while to work ourselves up to a hatred which would make that more difficult.

Third, and closely related to the second, comes the freedom which has been allowed to the discussion of the moral problem of war generally and of the justice of our intervention in this war. Many impatient patriots have been grievously offended, but the freedom to criticize national policy is part of the very thing we are fighting for. It is this which puts France, the United States, or England in the first list of civilized peoples, and to suppress free speech, except in its most licentious form, is to seek for victory at the price of all that makes it worth having.

No chill of doubt, therefore, will mar our thankfulness that so much latitude has been given to the critic of policy and to the enemy of all war. It has been interesting to see papers like the *Manchester Guardian* straining every nerve to secure recruits, and at the same time finding space to report the utterances of those who condemned the Government, or deemed fighting wrong under all circumstances. The courageous way in which the *Challenge* has published letters of the same character, though itself loyally supporting the country, and the robust conviction of the editor of the *Cambridge Magazine* that a university journal should give a hearing to all sides, have found not a little approval from the officers in the trenches. Happily the papers mentioned are but conspicuous instances. Again, it is good to recognize that in the pulpit we have men brave

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enough to question accepted ideas. It is good that the Head Master of Eton should force us to consider whether we shall be wise to continue to challenge all other nations by holding the keys of every sea. We have taken refuge too often behind the benevolence of our intentions ; we shall only meet the inevitable criticism of neutrals, and even of Allies, when we show that we too are prepared to take risks and make sacrifices for the equal commonwealth of nations. Dr. Lyttelton's words have done their work, despite the outcry against them. Wherever pulpit and press have been faithful and broadminded, this too will be an asset when we come to the reconstruction of European relations.

In the fourth place we may say with little fear of contradiction that on the average the young are far more sensitive to the scandal of war than are their elders. It is partly that they are not so inured to the general folly and wickedness of human society, as we have organized it, and partly that they have not lost the power to dream ; their thinking, too, is clarified by the fact that they may have to back their opinions with their lives, just because a system for which they are not responsible has lacked the moral conviction needful to find a less clumsy method of settling disputes. But whatever the cause, it is impossible to avoid the impression that, for all its wonderful readiness to fight, the younger generation is not satisfied with the conditions predisposing to war, or willing to accept as its mouthpiece the spluttering patriotisms of clubs and drawing-rooms. Please God, when the time for settlement comes, the young will not be silent.

Fifth, we have much to hope from those who have seen the actual devastation which war involves. All those who have harboured Belgian refugees, must have felt it to be intolerable that a nation should be overrun without provocation, and harried without the possibility of appeal. Those who have watched the work of relief in Holland, and still more in Belgium itself, have imbibed a horror for all war which they will keep till their dying day.

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Miss Evelyn Sharp tells of a wounded cavalryman who

had seen only two men fetched out alive from a company of eleven, smothered in the falling wall of a trench in which a 'Black Maria' had exploded; and in spite of everything was ready to go back if necessary, but dreaded it all the same—true courage here!—and said emphatically: 'There mustn't never be another war—there mustn't never be another.'

There should be an army of workers for brotherhood who in our ambulances and hospitals have seen the wastage of human life and marked how often the noblest are taken first. Nor must we forget the Red Cross workers of our social order, the men and women who have toiled to provide work for all their workpeople, those who have taken on their shoulders the laborious duty of befriending soldiers' and sailors' wives, the settlement workers, the honest politicians and economists—the people, in short, who live for the sake of others. In this war they have had a practical lesson as to the delicacy of our economic organization, and though to a careless eye we seem to have weathered the storm easily, they know how near it came to universal devastation, and they are not anxious that their own or any country should run the risk again.

Sixth, there is the illustration of social unity for a great purpose. We have accepted as a matter of course limitations or demands which before we thought impossible. To some extent vested interests have been swept aside in the emergency; surely for proven need they may be swept aside again, and to a far fuller degree. It would be easy to quote words of British leaders, but there is much hope in the letter of a German soldier quoted in the *Berliner Tageblatt*:

Shall we once more allow German fathers to fight for home and fatherland without taking reasonable care to guarantee them a portion in the soil they have won in conflict and in blood? Or will the men and women in leading positions have the courage and moral sensitiveness to face and shoulder the responsibility of the German home and the German family? That is the question which will settle the future of the German

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kingdom after the war. Oh, mother, this anxiety weighs on me and many a comrade more heavily than the question whether I or the man to the right or left shall get home alive and sound. Believe me, the fight here at the front means less in personal courage than to fight in peace time for truth, right, moral freedom, and unity in spiritual things.

The hand that wrote these words will never write again, but the thought is one which men from the trenches will reiterate in all the fighting countries ; when, even in Britain, so large a fraction of the population has been taken to serve the country, we shall not be able to refuse them a fuller right to live. But all experience shows that a genuine democracy cannot afford to tolerate the unbrotherly conditions which make for war—the belief in humanity within the nation involves a belief in humanity outside the nation—and here, too, there is room for high hope.

Finally and chiefly, in the attempt to Christianize the life of Europe we may look to find support from the armies engaged. Whether it be continental conscription or a voluntary response on the immense scale which we have seen in Britain, the present conflict has this great advantage that it calls to the colours the peaceable as well as the pugnacious, hotheads and thinkers alike. At no time in the past have armies been so qualified to gauge the rightness and reasonableness of war ; at no time in the past has war been so challenging in its absurdity ; at no time has the moral factor been so palpably outclassed by the mechanical. There is abundant evidence that outspoken condemnation of war is nowhere so approved as among the men who train or who fight. To start with, they seem to regard hate as waste of time and energy. A minister writes :

I have on my table letters from almost every camp in England, from Scotland, Egypt, and 'the front'. I search in vain for one bitter or angry word against Germany. The nearest approach . . . is the hope of one that 'he may soon . . . be sent across to strike a blow for the liberties of the nations'.

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Or here is the postcard of a German cavalry captain printed in a Berlin paper :

It is a remarkable phenomenon that, except at the outbreak of the war, hatred and contempt are not to be found at the front, but exclusively at home. We at the front do our duty, and respect the enemy who does the same.

On Christmas Day men behaved like brothers, and we are amazed because the reconciliation seems to have been so spontaneous. But surely it is only one more reminder that brotherhood, not conflict, is the natural relation of man to man.

Our soldiers and sailors have seen, too, what war involves ; do we think that the officer of the *Sydney* who went through ' the dreadful job of getting the badly wounded into the boats ' from the *Emden*, and then saw indescribable things along the decks which ' made her like a shambles ' , will not be anxious to prepare for peace, if human wisdom can do it ? A subaltern in a Scots regiment was killed on October 18. Two days earlier he wrote home telling how they had been thanked by the Commander of the Division for their grit and courage :

I advanced to a cemetery and stayed there most of the day. It is a beastly thing to have to do, digging trenches among graves and pulling down crosses . . . to make room. One feels that something is wrong when a man lies down behind a child's grave to shoot at a bearded German, who has probably got a family anxiously awaiting his return at home. . . . It was a miserable day. . . . There was a large crucifix at one end. The sight of the bullets chipping Christ's image about, and the knowledge of what He had done for us and the Germans, and what we were doing to His consecrated ground and each other, made one feel sick of the whole war (or sicker than before). . . . The last I saw of that place was the shattered crucifix standing up against the dawn, and the glare of a score of burning homesteads all around.

He has gone, with others of our bravest, but we shall have the same message from many of those who return. Has there ever been a war which has so revolted the combatants ?

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There are very wonderful stories of the chivalry of foe to foe. The letters of our own men often give proof of a spirit which would have warmed the heart of Sir Philip Sidney, and every now and then we come upon an instance of self-sacrifice on the German side which cannot fail to bind the nations in brotherhood. There is that story of the German on the stretcher going down to the field hospital with a strip of coarse paper pinned on his breast bearing these words in French: 'Look after this man well; he saved seven of our fellows.'

But as regards the essential humanity which reveals itself in war nothing has spoken more clearly than the letter of the French cavalry officer to his American fiancée, written on the battlefield and found by his body. He tells how he had been wounded in the chest and lost consciousness; then he goes on:

There are two other men lying near me, and I do not think there is much hope for them either. One is an officer of a Scottish regiment and the other is a private in the Uhlans. They were struck down after me, and when I came to myself I found them bending over me rendering first aid. The Britisher was pouring water down my throat from his flask, while the German was endeavouring to staunch my wound with an antiseptic preparation served out to them by their medical corps. The Highlander had one of his legs shattered, and the German had several pieces of shrapnel buried in his side. In spite of their own sufferings they were trying to help me, and when I was fully conscious again, the German gave us a morphia injection and took one himself. . . .

After the injection, feeling wonderfully at ease, we spoke of the lives we had lived before the war. We all spoke English, and we talked of the women we had left at home. Both the German and the Britisher had only been married a year. . . . I wondered, and I suppose the others did, why we had fought at all.

Brotherhood is only waiting for those who have the courage to believe it possible.

Some at least of the Germans have seen it. A captain of the Prussian Guards bearing the honoured name of

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the late ambassador to London, Marschall von Biberstein, before he died wrote to the *Friedenswarte* from the trenches the following record of his conviction :

Mankind must learn to conquer war ! It is not true that peace is only a dream, unbeautiful even as a dream; there must, there will come a time which will know war no more, and that time will mark a great advance on our own.

That is the lesson the trenches are teaching, and it all comes back to the passionate bad grammar of the cavalryman in hospital, 'There mustn't never be another war—there mustn't never be another.' As of old the armies will cast their swords into the scale, but this time it will be to secure a civilization superior to the sword.

These, then, are the fiery chariots God is preparing for His people. The issue between militarism and mutual trust will be sternly fought, and it will be long before selfishness and insularity give way to brotherhood. But Evil can never summon to its side such powers as those of which we have spoken. The chariots of fire will win the victory in God's own time.

He who gives us the help of others asks from us in turn all the strength we can muster ourselves. We shall find the enemy within ourselves, and those who are most convinced of the folly of war will find it hard to keep its spirit from rising again in their hearts. A writer in the *Manchester Guardian*, at the conclusion of an article on the Christmas truce, reminds us of this :

Allies as well as Germans, and even the bravest who have just been fearfully tried and cleansed in the fire of the trenches, are all better at catching glimpses than at following them.

Can we follow the glimpses we have received ? Can we mobilize the force for the making of a new world in ourselves and in others ? If we can, we may be sure of the power of God : if not, the struggle which costs us our bravest is likely to leave the moral condition of Europe little better than before.